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By helping operate the community centre in Gonubie Farmers Hall, SolidarMed is supporting the physical and mental wellbeing of children and young people, giving them the chance of a brighter future. mr
A visit that inspires hope

When project manager Patrick Thomas and I visited South Africa in the autumn of 2021, we met up with a grandmother who proudly showed us her magnificent vegetable garden. Thanks to the support of our local partner organisation, she uses it to generate a small income. She has also had a water tank installed and is in the process of having her home extended. She lives there with her two granddaughters and one of her daughters – the other one, who is mother to the two granddaughters, is HIV positive and has left the family. The granddaughter we meet is healthy and fit and is doing well at school.

This visit gives me hope because it shows that our work in South Africa helps people who urgently need it. The three projects support children and young people living with HIV or from households affected by HIV. And in South Africa that means a lot of people, as one in five people aged between 15 and 49 in the country is HIV positive. And the youngest are particularly hard hit, with over a quarter of a million children carrying the virus and 1.2 million children having lost their parents to the disease. It then mainly falls on grandmothers to care for the children orphaned by AIDS.

Without help, the country cannot manage the huge consequences of its previous failed HIV policy. Ten years ago, the Aids & Kind Foundation therefore set about supporting partner organisations in South Africa that look after children affected by AIDS, including many AIDS orphans.

As a former Board member at Aids & Kind, it is wonderful to see how our work is continuing since the Foundation merged with SolidarMed in the summer of 2020. The projects continue to be implemented by strong local partners, through organisations like Jika Uluntu (see p. 4–7), which are grassroots initiatives developed by local people. They are in tune with people’s needs and are familiar with the local structures and customs. Meanwhile, we at SolidarMed bring our expertise and financial support. We work on projects together and never lose sight of our goal – to offer children and young people affected by HIV and AIDS a brighter future.

This is only possible with your continued support, for which my team and I are extremely grateful.
Glimmers of hope for children in South Africa

In South Africa’s informal settlements, people are lacking just about everything. SolidarMed supports children and young people affected by HIV in these settlements, to give them the chance of a brighter future. Their parents also benefit from the wide-ranging projects.

South Africa Gonubie Farmers Hall, close to the port of East London, is an informal settlement. It consists of makeshift houses built between a few trees next to a motorway. Some 900 people live here. The houses are built out of wood, corrugated iron and cardboard. Built-in windows let light into the small living quarters. Very few residents have running water, a toilet or electricity. Because as the settlement does not officially exist, the authorities barely bother about it. A truck brings drinking water just once a week, and occasionally a mobile clinic stops by to provide people with minimal access to healthcare.

Nonetheless, the settlement is expanding rapidly. People from various rural parts of South Africa have moved here in search of work. Single mother Kuti Malawu has lived with her children in Gonubie Farmers Hall for several years:

▲ Single mother Kuti Malawu has lived with her children in Gonubie Farmers Hall for several years.

South Africa
Population 60 million
of whom are
HIV positive some 7.5 million
Income inequality Number 1 (worldwide)
In the spotlight

South Africa come to the East London region looking for work. Some have no choice but to move to Gonubie Farmers Hall. Others find work in the city or on the farms around the informal settlement, but many residents are day labourers, or unemployed. And, as a survey conducted in 2020 revealed, the biggest challenge is widespread alcohol consumption.

Glimmers of hope for the next generation

Children who grow up here are directly affected by the difficult conditions in the settlement, their parents’ poverty and a lack of prospects. Until recently, there were no supervised leisure facilities, nowhere to go for help with homework and nobody who had time for them. Thanks to SolidarMed, all that has changed. A new community centre was built around a year ago within walking distance of the informal settlement. It houses a nursery, a large playground, a classroom with computers, a kitchen and an office.

Brothers Mpho* (5) and Anga* (8), who live in the settlement, come here regularly. They get lunch, receive help with homework and can take part in learning programmes and group courses. This includes age-appropriate education about HIV/AIDS, because as elsewhere in South Africa, many people in this region are HIV-positive – often without even knowing it. It is therefore particularly important to sensitise children to the issue early on. They are also tested for HIV and receive medical treatment if necessary. At the community centre, Mpho and Anga receive a range of support to help them thrive. This gives them the chance of a brighter future despite the difficult circumstances.

The community centre has really struck a chord. “The need for support with homework in particular is huge,” explains Emma Rutherford. She is the director of Jika Uluntu, SolidarMed’s local partner organisation, which is implementing the project. “Even in primary school, children get a lot of homework, but many parents lack the ability or the knowledge to help their children. At the community centre, children receive one-to-one support with their learning. This boosts their self-confidence and is fun,” says Emma Rutherford. She goes on to say that the centre in general is a huge relief for

Parents know that their children are in good hands after school.”

Emma Rutherford, director of Jika Uluntu

Project successfully taken over from the Aids & Kind Foundation

SolidarMed took over this project from the former Aids & Kind Foundation in 2020. It has since been successfully continued and expanded under the management of SolidarMed. It is implemented by the non-profit organisation Jika Uluntu, which has a team of seven and strong local roots: its office is in Crossways, which is very close to the informal settlement and primary school (see map on page 6). Implementation by a local organisation makes sense as unlike other SolidarMed projects, this one has a more individual focus. Other projects in South Africa that

SolidarMed has taken over from the Aids & Kind Foundation are based in the province of Limpopo and in Johannesburg. These projects also promote the health of children affected by HIV and poverty and that of their caregivers, and are implemented by local partner organisations.

Aids & Kind
Schweizerische Stiftung für Direkthilfe an betroffene Kinder

22/1 3.2022
parents: “they have the peace of mind that their children are in safe hands after school and are doing their homework. Otherwise, many would be left to their own devices while their parents work or look for work.”

Besides children from the informal settlement, children and young people from surrounding villages also come to the community centre. They usually hear about the centre through the primary school in the village of Crossways, where a bus picks them up and brings them the few minutes' journey to the centre. The school itself is now much too small for the 850 pupils and the replacement building being constructed by the authorities is still unfinished. SolidarMed is working here too to make sure that the children are given the best possible chance to thrive: all pupils get a free breakfast every day so that they are better able to concentrate. Many would otherwise be going to school hungry. Children are also taught good manners through stories performed by puppets – for example they learn to say please and thank you and to not jump queues. These are important rules when interacting with their peers and later in life so that they can successfully participate in society. Those who stick to the rules and those who do well at school receive a prize.

Parents benefit too
Crucial to the children’s physical and mental wellbeing is also the situation of their caregivers. SolidarMed therefore also delivers targeted support to adults. In the informal settlement Gonubie Farmers Hall and in the immediate surroundings, social workers regularly visit some 130 households. They advise adults about health, parenting and looking for work. They also help them fill out and submit documents, for example to apply for child benefits from the government.

One of these adults is Kuti Malawu*, Mpho and Anga’s mother. The 38-year-old has not had an easy life. She grew up in difficult conditions. Later she was unable to find secure employment but
In the spotlight

did not receive any support from the authorities because she had no official documents. Her husband was violent, and two years ago, she had to undergo a breast operation. She turned to alcohol in an attempt to deal with her situation.

All that is now over. Thanks to support from the social workers, she is doing much better. She has stopped drinking, finally got official papers, found a full-time job and separated from her husband. And Anga, her 8-year-old son, can now attend school, although he still does not have a birth certificate. He receives help with homework at the community centre and is making rapid progress. “His school report is really impressive. You could think that he has been in school for years, although it’s only his first year,” says Kuti Malawu, beaming with pride. It is clear to her that “this was only possible thanks to Jika Uluntu and SolidarMed.” Her two youngest children should soon be able to go to the community centre too, which will be a huge relief for the single mother.

A holistic approach
Health and wellbeing comprise many areas. This is why SolidarMed and its partner organisation Jika Uluntu carry out this broad range of sub-projects to provide holistic support to children and young people, and to their caregivers. From covering children’s basic needs, such as providing a nutritious breakfast before school, and educating them about HIV/AIDS, to offering parenting support and helping people deal with bureaucracy to apply for benefits – the aim is to empower people and to give them prospects. In South Africa – the country with the highest level of social inequality in the world – it is and will remain important to show solidarity to those living in poverty without access to quality healthcare. And this is what SolidarMed continues to fight for. ❃ bw

*Names have been changed.

▲ Every morning, 850 pupils at the primary school in Crossways get breakfast. Many would otherwise be going to school on an empty stomach. mr
Making it easier to diagnose Covid-19

The MistraL research project
The Covid-19 pandemic is hitting the world hard. Many countries in the Global South only have limited capability to protect the population from the virus and to treat the sick. It is therefore key that protective, diagnostic and treatment measures are adapted to local conditions. This is where the MistraL project comes in: it is exploring various potential ways to make it easier to diagnose Covid-19 in remote regions of Lesotho.

Lesotho: limited diagnostic and treatment capacity
At the beginning of the pandemic in particular, diagnostic capacity in Lesotho was very limited. Healthcare workers were also lacking personal protective equipment, such as face masks, disposable gloves and gowns. This is why SolidarMed launched the MistraL research project with various partners in 2020. It enables people – even in remote areas – to get tested for Covid-19 and is studying new and easily implementable ways of diagnosing the virus (see opposite). It also equips and supports healthcare workers.

Making a difference on the ground and gaining knowledge for the future
This research project benefits the local population directly by containing the spread of Covid-19, treating the sick and strengthening the health system. At the same time, the project team is gaining important insights into the diagnosis of Covid-19. These findings are published in journals so that other countries can also benefit. Lesotho could also take advantage of new methods, which are not only supposed to diagnose coronavirus, but also other lung infections, such as tuberculosis, which is widespread in the country.

The MistraL research group
- Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute (Swiss TPH), Basel
  Principal investigator
- SolidarMed Lesotho Project implementation in Lesotho
- Radboud University Medical Center, the Netherlands
  Software development
- FIND, Genf
  Covid-19 diagnosis and project funding
- Ministry of Health Lesotho
  Close partner of SolidarMed in Lesotho
- Botnar Research Centre for Child Health, Basel and Zurich
  Project funding

Testing in hospital
People arriving at the hospital are tested for Covid-19, tuberculosis and later HIV. They are also asked for their consent to use the results for the MistraL study.

Community testing
Village health workers are being trained so that tests can also be carried out in remote communities. This will allow them to test people and pass the results on to the research team. They also ask people about their needs and what they think about the pandemic.
Diagnosing Covid-19 using x-ray images

The lung infection tuberculosis can be diagnosed using chest x-rays. The research project is trying to extend this method to Covid-19. A new software is being developed for this purpose so that the images can be analysed as quickly and simply as possible. For countries with unstable health systems such as Lesotho, this could in future relieve pressure on staff and facilitate access to treatment.


Identifying the most reliable rapid test

Because they are relatively cheap and deliver quick results, rapid antigen tests are particularly important in tackling the virus, including in Lesotho. This research project discovered that a nasal swab delivered a similarly reliable result to the usual nasopharyngeal swab.


Blowing into a tube – could it be that easy?

As part of the Mistral project, the partners are also testing a new diagnostic procedure from the United States. In addition to the regular Covid-19 test, the person blows into a plastic tube equipped with a filter. The idea is that infectious diseases such as Covid-19 and tuberculosis can be diagnosed by means of fine particles in the breath. The initial results are promising.


Equipping healthcare workers

SolidarMed equipped healthcare workers with urgently-needed personal protective equipment in two hospitals. Both in the hospitals and in the villages, those responsible can also use an innovative digital app which helps them examine potential cases of Covid-19 and tuberculosis quickly and accurately.

From December 2020 to June 2022.

Diagnosis and surveys in remote communities

Village health workers test as many people as possible in the villages around Butha-Buthe to reduce the spread of Covid-19. They ask people about their opinions and experiences of the pandemic in general, tests and vaccination. This qualitative research provides important insights that could feed into recommendations on Lesotho’s future handling of the pandemic.

Riccardo, how have the first few months at SolidarMed been and how have you settled in in Chiúre?
Things were a bit complicated at first. Due to the violent uprisings in the north of Mozambique, my Swiss partner and our baby, who was four months old at the time, had to stay in Switzerland. I had never been to Mozambique before. My first impression of the region was that it is an interesting mix between an African country and Portugal. So, overall, the first few months were quite hard, but very exciting.

As you said, the situation in the Cabo Delgado region is very tense due to violent extremism. What made you still decide to move there?
Of course I had some reservations in the beginning because the whole situation has been and still is unpredictable. At first, the locals always said that the situation was OK, but after the attacks in Mocímboa da Praia and Pemba in March 2021, even they were
afraid. I was told not to take photos, not to talk to strangers and not to tell anyone where I was living. Fortunately, my family was able to join me in September. Thanks to SolidarMed, we were able to settle in Nampula, which is a bit further south and is safer. I now travel up to the north during the week for work.

What were your reasons for wanting to work in such a difficult environment?
I believe in what I do and I know that my work can make many people’s lives better. I’ve always felt that we are incredibly lucky in Europe and I wanted to use my energy and my privilege to make a difference, to play a part in change. I am also keen to bring my daughter up in an environment like this so that I can teach her my values. She needs to be aware that everyday life is not the same everywhere.

“What I believe in what I’m doing and I know that my work can make many people’s lives better.”

Riccardo Lazzaro, project manager, Mozambique

What previous experience has shaped you?
For sure my role as head nurse at a children’s hospital in Somaliland, where we had to find solutions to clinical problems with virtually no resources. Often, it is the small solutions that have a big impact and can save lives. I can use this knowledge in my work in Mozambique. And in Sudan, I learned a lot from the culture and the humanity of the people. Their hospitality is remarkable. Perhaps because of the harsh conditions in the desert, people share whatever they have, even if it’s almost nothing.

Did you already know when you trained as a nurse that it would take you away from Europe?
Yes, I always wanted to work outside Europe. Even as a teenager, I was in awe of Gino Strada, an Italian surgeon and peace activist who set up a large non-profit organisation. I read his book Pappagalli Verdi (English: Green Parrots. A War Surgeon’s Diary) and I found it incredibly inspiring. At the moment I wouldn’t feel comfortable living in Europe knowing that there is such inequality all over the world.

What are the biggest challenges in your current role at SolidarMed?
Particularly at the beginning, I had to get used to focussing on the role of project manager although there is also significant demand for clinical support. But my mission here is to manage the ‘Survive and thrive’ project (see box) and to make a real, long-term difference. I want to build a local team that is independent and that can take the project to the next level. So at some point I will take a step back and hand responsibility over to my colleagues.

What do you think of SolidarMed’s relations with authorities and partners?
SolidarMed has been on the ground for a long time. So our relationship with the Ministry of Health and other organisations is very good. We are a reliable and stable partner, even when the going gets tough and even when things around us are changing, we stay here, on the ground.

The ‘Survive and thrive’ project
The emergency departments in Mozambique’s hospitals and health centres are often crowded, and waiting times are long. To ensure that children in life-threatening situations get treated more quickly than less urgent cases, SolidarMed rolled out a colour coding system in many hospitals since 2016. When they arrive, children are given a coloured card which denotes the urgency of their treatment. The project will be presented in detail in the May issue of Focus.
More hospitals rely on successful kangaroo method

**Tanzania** The method known as Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC) is as simple as it is effective: the mother holds her newborn baby directly against her skin to prevent the child’s body temperature from dropping. This helps significantly improve the survival chances of premature infants and newborns with low birthweight in the critical first days. This was clearly shown by SolidarMed’s pilot project in Lugala hospital in Tanzania. The method has been used in the ward built by SolidarMed since July 2019 and has led to an increase in newborn survival rates from 76% to 91%. The ward quickly reached capacity (see Focus 11/2020), so SolidarMed built an additional newborn intensive care unit in 2020.

Impressed by the success of this concept, three other hospitals in the Morogoro region will be gradually introducing KMC with SolidarMed’s support from 2022. For this purpose, SolidarMed will be building an additional department in two of the hospitals in the next few months, while the third is to be renovated in 2023. In addition to the respective intensive care units, all hospitals will gradually introduce KMC. Healthcare workers will also receive training and there will be public awareness campaigns. As the method will not be rolled out everywhere simultaneously, SolidarMed will be able to gain a more detailed insight into its impact. This in turn will allow SolidarMed to be able to issue recommendations to the Tanzanian authorities so that newborn mortality can be further decreased in the long term. ■ bw

SolidarMed supports the Levy Mwanawasa Medical University

**Zambia** Starting this year, SolidarMed is supporting the establishment of a new department for the training of clinicians and nurses at the Levy Mwanawasa Medical University. The focus is on improving the teaching skills of trainers. Additional centres for practical training will also be built at three regional hospitals. The centres will be equipped with seminar rooms and training areas, learning resources and research and administrative facilities. The aim is to ensure high-quality teaching with a practical orientation. The project will benefit 150 trainers and 1,200 students every year, which will improve the quality of primary healthcare for over a million people. SolidarMed is therefore playing an important part in tackling the acute shortage of qualified healthcare workers in Zambia and pursuing its long-standing collaboration with the country’s Ministry of Health. ■ bw
Emergency aid for refugees fleeing terror: one year on

**Mozambique** Thanks to the partnership with Swiss Solidarity and over CHF 100,000 in private donations, SolidarMed has been supporting people fleeing the violence of terrorist groups in Mozambique’s northern Cabo Delgado province for around a year. In collaboration with the local authorities and other aid organisations, SolidarMed has built 750 latrines. These latrines improve hygiene conditions in the resettlement villages where many refugees are sheltered. SolidarMed is also supporting mobile clinics, which provide medical services which people would otherwise not have access to given the long distances to healthcare facilities. In addition, hygiene kits have been distributed and 30,000 fabric masks to protect against Covid-19 have been produced by people trained by SolidarMed.

Meanwhile, the situation in the Cabo Delgado district remains unstable, with terror groups continuing to attack civilians. This makes returning there a remote possibility for the 700,000 or so refugees. Many will probably end up living in the resettlement villages or the provincial town of Pemba in the longer term.

The situation is fraught in the resettlement villages too. In recent months there have been increasing reports of sexual exploitation in exchange for goods and food. In the first half of 2022, SolidarMed is therefore raising awareness of the topic of gender-based violence among key figures in the community: religious leaders, traditional birth attendants and managers of health centres. This is intended to make it easier to recognise cases of gender-based violence and break the taboo.

From mid-2022 SolidarMed will shift the focus back to its core task of strengthening the overburdened healthcare facilities in the Cabo Delgado province. This will benefit locals and refugees. Other organisations will continue to deliver emergency aid in the resettlement villages. ■ bw

▲ Refugees in resettlement villages receive mosquito nets to protect them from malaria. SolidarMed has long been working in the region and is helping distribute the nets. pma

▲ SolidarMed distributes hygiene kits containing sanitiser, soap and detergent to reduce the spread of cholera and Covid-19. pma
At the end of 2021, only 2.2% of Tanzania’s population had received a Covid-19 vaccination. There was a shortage of vaccines and some people had prejudices or were afraid. SolidarMed raises public awareness and supports the authorities.

Benatus Sambili, Country Director, Tanzania
Leaving a gift in your will

A donation in your will can be a way of continuing to support the causes you care about. We as an organisation see legacies and bequests as a commitment to giving disadvantaged people the chance of better health.

**Lucerne** SolidarMed is extremely grateful for donations left in people’s wills. They are a way for people to pass on a piece of their life story – by looking after disadvantaged people and allowing them to access better healthcare. To us, legacies and bequests are a commitment to act on behalf of the deceased and to fight for disadvantaged people in southern Africa. Legacies and bequests are often the start of new and lasting initiatives.

“Sometimes we know the people who leave a gift to us,” says donations adviser Lucy Kormann. There is the doctor who worked for SolidarMed (or rather its predecessor SKMV) in Cameroon in his younger years and who has followed and supported the organisation his whole life. Or the photographer whose field visits for SolidarMed left a mark and who through his bequest wanted to make sure that the health programmes in Lesotho continue. “But all too often we are not aware of the deceased’s motivations. And it’s too late to ask,” Kormann explains.

In a recent conversation, an older supporter said she felt SolidarMed had wonderful programmes and that the organisation struck the right balance between proximity and distance with regard to its supporters. “Obviously we are always thrilled to hear things like that,” says Lucy Kormann. “It’s important to us that – if supporters so wish – we develop a relationship of trust and respect – at events, at the Annual General Meeting, and in one-to-one conversations.”

If you have any questions about legacies and bequests, or just want to discuss something, feel free to contact Lucy Kormann. She would love to hear from you. Are you looking to write a will? Do you want to find out about estate planning? Or perhaps you are looking to contact a notary or solicitor? You will also find information on legacies and bequests on our website. We would also recommend our partner platform deinadieu.ch, which provides a wide range of information on all matters related to wills and legacies.
Solidarity – the backbone of society

Pencil the date in now: on Friday, 20 May, we will be talking about solidarity as the backbone of society with various experts at a public panel discussion (in German) at the Neubad Lucerne. The event will be moderated by Barbara Bleisch, philosopher and presenter of the philosophy programme Sternstunde Philosophie on Swiss channel SRF. The Annual General Meeting for members of SolidarMed will be held beforehand.

**Date** Friday, 20 May 2022

**Venue** Neubad, Bireggstrasse 36, Lucerne

**Time** 5.30pm: Annual General Meeting; 7.45pm: Public panel discussion. The events can be attended individually.

**More information at** [www.solidarmed.ch/en/events](http://www.solidarmed.ch/en/events)

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**Switch to QR payment slips**

From 1 October 2022, the Swiss Post will only accept the new QR payment slips. The previous orange and red ones will no longer be valid. SolidarMed will switch to the new QR payment slips in the middle of the year.

Please note the following:

- From August we will send our donation appeals with the new QR payment slip. From October, we will no longer be able to receive donations with the old payment slips.
- Our account for donations will remain 60-1433-9 / IBAN CH09 0900 0000 6000 1433 9.
- We would be happy to send you one or more blank QR payment slips.
- You can continue to donate online on our website with TWINT, credit card, debit card or PostFinance Card: [solidarmed.ch/donate](http://solidarmed.ch/donate)

Thank you for your understanding.

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If you have any questions, you can call us from Monday to Friday on +41 41 310 66 60 or email us at contact@solidarmed.ch.

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Your donation makes a difference.

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